PUGET SOUND ADVOCATES FOR RETIREMENT ACTION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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GARRY OWENS OF PUGET SOUND ADVOCATES FOR RETIREMENT ACTION, SEATTLE BLACK PANTHER PARTY

INTERVIEWEE: GARRY OWENS

INTERVIEWERS: KAREN RICHTER

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[00:00:00] **KAREN RICHTER:** This is Karen Richter. I am starting the PSARA—Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Actions—oral history project. We are interviewing Garry Owens today at PSARA's offices in Seattle. It's May 31, 2018 and this is the audio interview.

Hi, Garry. It's a real privilege to interview you today.

[00:00:25] **GARRY OWENS:** It's my privilege. Thank you for asking.

[00:00:27] **KAREN:** As we were talking before we started just now, you were talking about your background, so maybe we should start there, and you can tell us a little bit about where you were born and when.

[00:00:39] **GARRY:** I was born here in Seattle in 1944 on Halloween. My family originally, on my mother's side, was from Ellensburg. They moved here during the Depression. Ellensburg suffered from a lot of things, I guess, so people had to move closer to where they thought they had resources.

The ironic thing about my family is that from my great-grandmother to my grandmother to my mother, they all had their first child when they were 16, so they were all young women and young mothers, of course. That created a lot of closeness in the family.

On my dad's side, my dad was 19. He grew up in Seattle. His family was originally from Louisiana and they migrated up here, I think, for work during that same period.

I didn't know his family. I knew my mother's family, obviously, so I never really knew him. My mother fell in love with Sylvester Owens, who at that time was in the service. He came out and he worked in the maritime industry. She met him when I was probably maybe a year and a half, two years old, so I ended up having his name, not my birth father's name. I was an Owens, not biologically, but that was on my birth certificate.

Growing up here, I was actually born in what was called Chinatown. It's now called the International District/Chinatown. That's where my family lived for many, many years. It's very interesting because at that time, the Black community was very diverse, so they had a lot of Black businesses there—barber shops and restaurants and dry cleaners and tailors and what not.

I grew up in an environment where it seemed very appropriate to live in a community where you saw all kinds of people. Some people looked like you. You saw people who looked from a different ethnicity or race, and it all seemed very normal.

Because we were basically a low-income family, we lived in a series of projects. We lived in a project called Stadium Homes, which was outside of the old Sick's Stadium, the baseball stadium in southeast Seattle. That was the first project I lived in outside of Chinatown. Then we moved to Rainier Vista, which was another housing project.

[00:04:11] **KAREN:** Is that where you went to school?

[00:04:13] **GARRY:** Yes, I started school in Rainier Vista in kindergarten. My mother had done me a great favor. I didn't know that at the time, but she, as a young mom, decided that one of the things I should know at an early age was how to read, even before I went to school. So, when I started kindergarten, I already knew how to read.

That was a great asset for me because I was an only child until I was 12, so my best friend really was the library because it was a safe place to go. I could go there by myself, and I would come home with books. It's just that I didn't have any playmates at home, so the books were my friends.

That really helped me in a lot of different ways to understand the value of words, not so much that I had to believe everything I read—which I probably did at the time—but the fact that there was all this information and it was accessible. To bring home 10 or 15 books at a time and read them, and you could subscribe to have them again, that was a great asset for me, and I think it helped me understand that—now, I guess you would say, words do matter, especially if they're written.

That helped me later on become more of a critical reader, meaning that I didn't have to believe everything I read, but at least I had to read it first and to have some kind of concept about what information was being given out.

Then we moved into a house up on Beacon Hill. That was the first house that we lived in.

[00:05:57] **KAREN:** How old were you?

[00:05:58] **GARRY:** I was 11 or 12. I had a brother born, and a couple years later, a sister born, so I had two more siblings, but we had an age difference.

Then we had some money issues so we had to move back to the projects for a little while. Then we moved to Mount Baker, across the street from Franklin. I'd finished high school already. When I turned 19 or 20, I got drafted because that was the uptick of the Vietnam War.

I got drafted. I kind of went through a rebellious stage where I really didn't want to go, so I got sent to—actually what happened to me—a funny story—is that I went to the place where they sign you up and make you take the pledge and all that. We were down on the waterfront at the Coast Guard center.

I remember coming down the stairs and I was getting on the bus. I said, "Where are we going?" They said, "You don't know where you're going? You're going to Ford Ord, California." I said, "Right now?" They said, "Yeah, right now."

I came down the stairs and everybody else went to the right and I went to the left by myself. Walked all along the railroad tracks. Went downtown. Ran into my mother. She was getting off work and she said, "How did it go?" I said, "It went okay." [laughing]

We went home, and about 9:00 or so, after dinner and all that, I heard a knock on the door. You know, my dad was a seaman at the time. He was home. He opened the door—I was in my room—and they said, "We're looking for a Private Garry Wade Owens." He said, "Private?" They said, "Yes, he was sworn in this morning, but now he's AWOL. We can't find him."

Of course, I was in my room. [laughing] I had to come down and they had to handcuff me. I had to go to Fort Lawton at the time, out in Magnolia. I spent the night in a cell. Then they flew me down the next day to Fort Ord in California.

I got there, and my sense of rebellion was still alive and kicking. We got there on a weekend so I was waiting to get processed, so I didn't have anything Army on me. I had an incident that happened that made me realize I didn't really want to be there.

The incident was kind of alarming. There was a lot of diversity in our barracks. I'm sitting on my bunk, the lower bunk, and a guy ahead of me was smoking a cigar, and he dumped his ashes in my coat on purpose. So, it started a scuffle and all that.

The sergeant came in and said, "I'm going make sure that you and him do everything together. He's going to be your foxhole buddy. He's going to go every place you go." And I'm thinking, what? Not him. Somebody else.

I realized that I didn't need to be there, so what happened was, because we were there on a weekend—no processing, as I said—I stood at the end of the line on Monday morning, and when they turned left, I turned right. I ended up hitchhiking all the way back to Seattle with no money.

Went to my godmother's house. She turned me in. The police took me back. [laughing] This time, they took me to Fort Lewis. I stayed in the Fort Lewis jail for about a week. Then they put me on a train and sent me back.

I'll never forget, when I got down there to Ford Ord, California, they took me to the military police station and they said, "This is Private Owens. He doesn't seem to want to be here, so maybe you could talk to him." The head sergeant—he was the biggest Black man I'd ever seen in person that I'd ever seen in my life—says, "Come over here and sit next to me."

We talked and he said, "You've got a choice. I'm going to tell you the choice. The choice is you can do your two years and be gone and go back to your family, or you can do two years in military prison, and when you get out, you've still got to do two years in the Army. It's your choice."

He left and just left me sitting there. "I'll let you think about it. Do you drink coffee?" I said, "No, sir." It was just me by myself, and I'm looking at the door again and I'm thinking, phew, should I go again or should I stay? [laughing]

I stayed and I ended up not having to go to Vietnam only because, as I got further and further in, being ready to be deployed to go, I ended up going to Fort Gordon, Georgia and Fort Bragg, North Carolina, for training to be a radio operator.

Then something tragic happened. My mother had an aneurysm. They flew me home. She died right before I got there. My dad had rejoined the Merchant Marine and he was in Japan and he came back, so that messed up our whole family. But it turned out, because I was gone for like a month for bereavement leave, I didn't have enough time left to be deployed. So, I always say that my mother saved me from going to Vietnam, but for a high price.

I say all that to say that I think that the tools of survival that I got from my family are still with me today. I think that one of the tools of survival for me is knowledge, and that's maybe why I have this affirmation for reading and doing all this research.

I've got like a gazillion books at my house. People say, "Do you read all these books?" I say, "I try." But I got that from my family. My family, even though they were low income, it means that I'm coming home from school and seeing my dad reading a newspaper, and we had all these magazines—Colliers and Saturday Evening Post and all these magazines that we subscribed to. I guess even though we were in the projects and didn't have a lot of money, they were accessible.

They liked to read, and we didn't watch that much TV. We probably watched some, but they liked to read. I think I got some sort of intellectual development from them.

[00:13:20] **KAREN:** That's a wonderful gift.

[00:13:22] **GARRY:** Yeah, it was a great gift for me, and I think if I had to do it over again, I wouldn't change. I would hope that my mother could be here, but she went for a reason, too.

[00:13:34] **KAREN:** How old were you about this time?

[00:13:36] **GARRY:** I was 21. I was just coming into being maturated, or whatever that word is. It hit me hard in the sense that because I was my mother's oldest child, I was close to her, and she was close to her mother, and she was close to her mother.

It was hard because I didn't know if I could even have a life without my mother because people said, "How old was your mother?" I said, "My mother was 37 when she died." People said, "I've got a sister who's 37." I said, "Well, I lost my mother very young, and she wasn't here very long."

People said, "What do you do about that?" I said, "I just never forget. She's buried out at Bellevue, and I go there and talk to her and put flowers on her grave, and I'm showing her pictures of her grandsons and grandchildren, her granddaughter and her great-granddaughters. That kind of keeps me connected. In a way, I just say she's away."

There's a part of the African American culture where we don't necessarily say people are dead. We say they're away, meaning that they're somewhere else. Maybe they could be in heaven, but they could be somewhere else, too. We don't go that far. [laughing]

[00:15:24] **KAREN:** You talked about being arrested a couple of times. How did you become an activist? Was that the beginnings of it, do you think?

[00:15:30] **GARRY:** I became an activist because when I got out of the service, I went to school with now King County Councilman, Larry Gossett. We both went to Franklin. He lived in the neighborhood that I lived in when I was younger. He started off in a different place because he grew up in High Point.

We ended up being friends in high school, so when he went to the University of Washington, he saw me someplace right after I got out of the service and asked me if I would consider coming to the University of Washington. I said, "Larry, I don't know if my grades are good enough for that." He said, "Just think about it."

Something ironic happened. I'm sitting out in the Coffee Corral, which was a 24-hour restaurant on 42nd and the Ave in the University District, late at night. I had started a journal when I was in the service. I'm writing in it and an older man comes in and he nods to me. He asked me if I was a student. I said, "No." He said, "You're writing something. What are you writing?" I said, "It's my journal." "Oh, a journal. I'm an English professor. As a matter of fact, I'm the Assistant Dean of English at the University of Washington. Do you mind if I look at what you've written, or is it real personal?" I said, "It's personal but you can see it if you want to."

He looked at it for about five minutes or so and he said, "Are you a student?" I said, "No, sir, I'm not a student." He said, "Why?" I said, "I don't qualify." He took out his card and gave me his card and said, "Would you come see me in about a week?" I said, "Okay."

I went home and I showed my dad his card and my dad said, "Maybe he's going to help you get a job or something like that. That'd be great."

I went and saw him a week later and he gave me this envelope and he said, "I want you to take this down to Schmitz Hall. It's a place you need to go to." He didn't tell me what it was. I go there, and there was a name on it who I was supposed to see. It was the person who enrolls people into the school, that office.

I gave it to the receptionist and she takes it back to the woman whose name was on it. The woman comes out five minutes later and says, "Come back, Mr. Owens. I'd like you to sit down in my office." We were in the office and the first thing she says is . . . I'm blanking on the professor's name right now, but she says, "The professor really thinks highly of you and was influenced by the fact that you had good writing skills and you seemed to be very articulate. He's asking me if we would allow you to be a fully matriculated student."

I jumped up out of my chair and I said, "No! I'm not guilty! I didn't trick anybody!" She said, "Calm down." She had to explain to me what matriculation was. All I heard was the "trick" part. I kept thinking, oh, man, this is another mess I got myself into.

But that's how I got into the University of Washington because this person helped me, saw something in me. That's how I got enrolled. That helped me to join, in a more formal way—I ended up being at the beginning of the formation of the Black Student Union at the same time that I was helping the Black Panthers get started in the community. There were two things happening at one university, in the District. One in the community with the Black Panthers and stuff and the other one on campus. I was one of the original Panthers in Seattle there.

[00:20:00] **KAREN:** Let's talk about that a little bit if you don't mind.

[00:20:03] **GARRY:** Sure.

[00:20:04] **KAREN:** We were wondering if you were a member of the Black Panthers here in Seattle. Were you involved anywhere else in the country with the Black Panthers?

[00:20:14] **GARRY:** No. All my experience with the Panthers was pretty much in Seattle. I was surprised when I ended up moving back East to go to school at Hampshire College in Amherst [MA] that people knew who I was. I thought they were following me and they were spies or something. Somehow, my reputation went with me, so people knew. They did some research or whatever and they found out.

I went to Hampshire in 1972. Partly it was because there was so much activism in my life at the University of Washington, it was hard to go to class. We're doing this, we're doing that. We're in the community with the Panthers with the free breakfast program and the Atlantic Street Center.

Teachers from different schools were asking us to come and talk to their students who were out of line and offer a different kind of discipline, saying, "You've got to respect the teachers." We gave them information, because what was happening was there was a new series of intellectual history being offered in the schools, but a lot of teachers didn't have access to it.

So, we were coming in and offering to help offer to talk to the students, and then talking to the teachers. "Here's some resources that might help some of your students, particularly the African American students. They might engage because you're telling them a story that they had never heard before." We were doing that, and some other schools wanted to pay us and all that, and we said, "No, we're not here for that. We're just doing it because we have the time and interest."

But all that took so much time that it didn't help my academic progress very much, so I needed to do it over. So, I went to Hampshire because my counselor found out that Hampshire College had a new college, a small college, in Amherst—no grades as an experiment—and it was connected to the other four colleges, two women's colleges, Mount Holyoke, and Smith and Amherst, which at that time was all male, and U Mass, which was the large university.

What made it so interesting is that you could take—and it still holds today—you could take classes on any of the campuses as part of your tuition without paying any extra fees, and have that part of your transcript. That was really great for me because I got to have an experience, not only on one campus, but on all five campuses.

[00:23:00] **KAREN:** What were you studying?

[00:23:02] **GARRY:** Actually, I didn't know at the time. [laughing] I was interested in education. I was interested in history. I was interested in health. I really got interested in health. I helped set up some of the

clinics that we set up here in Seattle, and I thought I might be a doctor, but I realized I wasn't disciplined enough then, but I could do something else.

My mother was a dietician at the Veterans Hospital in Seattle, which was adjacent to where we were living in Rainier Vista, so I used to hear her talk about it. As a young mother, her plan was to go back to school, so I was interested in a lot of different things. I played music. I was into drama. I was in plays and stuff.

The way I got into Hampshire was my counselor at the University of Washington—I asked her to recommend me. She sent out a statement that recommended me to go to that school. But instead of filling out the form, she wrote a poem about me and sent it to them, saying that I was one of her Renaissance students; that I knew a little bit about everything; that I was interested in everything; that I was not afraid to go into places that I didn't know anything about. I had a lot of intellectual curiosity.

When I went to that school, they said that was the most brilliant statement—the school had been open for two years; it opened in 1970—that anybody had ever written. They wished that she had filled out the form, but this was better because it was saying something about what she knew about me as my mentor.

[00:25:08] **KAREN:** Do you remember the poem?

[00:25:11] **GARRY:** No, I don't, actually. I probably have it someplace. But I was flattered. She said, "I wasn't thinking as much about you getting into that college. I just wanted people to know what I thought about you; that you're interested in all these different things. That's why I was endeared to you because you were not afraid to study. You weren't afraid to go anywhere."

What happened on the campus at the University of Washington, me and some other students got called on by graduate student formations to go and talk to them about books that we were reading about revolution and all kinds of stuff. We'd meet on the lawn, mostly in the spring. We'd meet outside on the grass. Here I am, a freshman and sophomore, green behind the ears, and they're asking me these questions about my analysis about this or that or whatever.

I was humble, so I didn't try to be humble, but I didn't know what they wanted me to know. They just said, "The fact that you read it and you absorbed it, and you're not biased about other things." They said that they were biased because they had to read all this other stuff. "And you haven't read it. You just read a text of what somebody else wrote. That's your reference, so you didn't have any outside influences like we have, so—this is a word that I didn't even know— "you have an unfettered concept." I'm thinking, that sounds kind of cool. [laughing]

That conundrum of events for me academically really helped me understand that I was smart enough to be there. And I was. That education was not just where you go. It's what you do with the information that you gather. What information is important to you?

To also know that you need to be curious about what you don't know. That's kind of what has followed me. That's why my house is full of papers and books. My storage is the same thing. I'm just in this ongoing quest to know more. The scholarship in different areas is tremendous all over the world. That's a way of communicating, a way now that, through the age of technology, it's probably even more accessible than it was when I was younger. It heightened my interest to know that I could communicate with people on different levels.

It led me to my interest in the last, I would say, 10 years or so. It had to do with my involvement with [retiree scott and lelo? 00: 28:33] because I got to develop another side of what he thought was important. That is, to understand more about what's going on internationally.

So, I got a chance to go. I've been to Cuba, I've been to Mexico, I've been to Brazil and Nicaragua—a lot of different places—which has never been for pleasure. It's always been for understanding and providing some form and camaraderie and fellowship, and trying to get some ideas on how we could help, how we could partner.

People used to say to me that they didn't have anything to offer to us, and we said we didn't agree because they had powerful stories to tell. They ended up telling stories about how imperialism had come in, and capitalism, and all kinds of isms that affect them that come out of our country. That was something you could find in a book, but to hear it from the people themselves, the non-deprecating way they said it, like this is just the way it is, created for me the notion that through Tyree, I learned that I needed to be an international ally for people that needed our help, not just in Africa but wherever. That's why he wanted us to go places, so we did go to Africa. We went to South Africa twice, once with him, just a learning experience, and then once with the world racism conference [World Conference Against Racism] , which was very interesting.

I think that I'm still in that mode and growing and reaching out and making myself accessible, and wanting to go places. It's kind of hard because people frame. When I say I think I want to go somewhere, they think that I want to do it to have fun. I'm not averse to fun. I love fun. [laughing] But it's not my main motivation.

My main motivation is to connect with people so that there's some sense of notion that we care about people, their destiny, because a lot of it's tied to a lot of the stuff that happens in the West, particularly in the United States. We've tethered them to us for all the wrong reasons.

[00:31:19] **KAREN:** You did this later on in life. Right? Let's go back. How did you meet your wife?

[00:31:28] **GARRY:** I met my wife at the place I was working, CAMP— Central Area Motivation Program—which was, at that time, a community service for the Black community mostly in the middle of the Black community. It ended up being headed by Larry Gossett, who was my high school friend, and a friend at the university at the Black Student Union.

At the time that he started working there, I was in Louisiana. I came back, and when I came back, they said, "You should go to him. He might help you get a job." So, I went there, and he didn't give me a job. Cindy Domingo was working there in the minor home repair program. She wasn't the director yet, but she was the administrative assistant.

[00:32:37] **KAREN:** What were you doing?

[00:32:39] **GARRY:** I was on the Board. I was the treasurer, so I had to sign the checks, so I used to see people all the time. When I came back from Louisiana, the person who was the director was a friend of somebody I knew in New Orleans, so he wanted me to check him out. I was going to the home repair program office at that time, so that's how I met Cindy.

She asked me a couple of times to give her a ride to the airport. That's how we connected. We started dating, and then we got married and had two kids. The rest is history. I've known her now for . . . we dated for four years, and my oldest kid is 27, so I've known her for 31 years. Long time. It is what it is. [laughing]

[00:33:50] **KAREN:** You have two kids. Can you talk about them?

[00:33:52] **GARRY:** I have three kids, actually. I have an older daughter, Anne Marie, who was born when I was at the University of Washington. All my kids are biracial. Anne Marie's mother is white, and we have a good relationship. We didn't at first, but she had her out of wedlock, and at that time, I wanted to keep my

unborn child but she didn't. That created some friction, so I didn't meet Anne Marie until she was 18 when she asked if she could meet her birth father.

Somebody in her family—the adoption agency had all my information because I was updating where I was and all that, so she called me and said, "Your daughter, Anne Marie, would like to meet you. What do you think about that?" I said, "I've been waiting for that call for 18 years, so I'm good." That's how we met.

She got adopted by a white family. They lived out in Bellevue. She had three or four siblings. We all got very close, and Cindy was in that process, too. She ended up getting married, and I have two granddaughters. I saw two of them this past weekend. It was Cindy's mom's 89th birthday, so we had a birthday party for her.

But, yeah, it's been a really interesting family dynamic in terms of the family I came from, the family I married into. Cindy came from a much bigger family than me, so when there's a family soiree, there's more people than I can count. At my mother-in-law's birthday party this past Sunday, they were talking about some other cousins and partners who were having babies, so there may be a baby explosion in this family. Phew. I'm kind of glad I'm through with that part.

But that's what happens. My observation is that people who grow up in large families don't have a problem with having their own large families. Me, I was alone. I was a 12-year-old and didn't have any siblings. It was hard because we had such a large age difference. My brother wanted to hang out with me and I said, "You can't hang out with me." I kind of hurt his feelings, and I felt bad about that.

Somebody said, "You can't say that to him." I said, "I don't call you my little brother, I call you my 'little bother.'" He said, no, I had to apologize to him. I apologized to him and he came up and gave me a big ol' hug. So, we were close.

Unfortunately, both of my younger siblings died prematurely. My sister died of cancer when she was in her early thirties. My brother had something going on with him in his early forties. They have been gone for a long time so I don't have any siblings.

[00:37:17] **KAREN:** I'm glad you're still here.

[00:37:19] **GARRY:** Me, too.

[00:37:22] **KAREN:** There may be people in future generations that don't really understand the Black Panthers, so can you talk a little bit about their mission and goals, how that all started, and your role?

[00:37:34] **GARRY:** The mission came from Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale and Richard Aoki, who were students at college in Oakland. Huey was from the Deep South—Louisiana, I believe—and he was aware of the contradictions of the American democracy and what that meant. Bobby Seale had been in the service. He was from Philadelphia. I think Richard Aoki was from the Bay Area.

But they all met at a college in Oakland, and they had studied some of the other movements around Malcolm X and Martin Luther King and all the other movements that were happening during the 60s that were manifesting themselves in different ways.

The original name of the party was the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. The notion was that people had a right to carry a gun and defend themselves, so that's how that started. But I think part of the notion was to also figure out a way to serve the community, because the community was hurting in a lot of different ways.

The educational system wasn't that good. People didn't really have a good idea of where they came from. Before their ancestors were slaves, where did they come from? That was never part of the curriculum, even when I was coming up. We were always slaves, and that was our history. We asked that question, "Where did the slaves come from?" "That's not relevant," and they'd just move on.

We thought it was important to show the community that we had their back in different ways, so part of our program was to look at some of the issues that were the most crucial. Some of the most crucial areas were the areas of health and the areas of poverty, particularly when it pertained to children. The issue for children was in some of the areas, in the poorer areas, the kids didn't have enough to eat, so kids would go to school hungry.

We had this constant saying that we think it's impossible to learn on an empty stomach, so I think part of the issue for us was what do you do about it? Instead of asking the government or the school district to do something about it, we said let's start some free breakfast programs for kids in different parts where we know there's some impoverishment.

Rather than shame or blame the parents or the caretakers, let's just feed the kids before they go to school, and provide them with some information they might not get in school, the same information we were getting in understanding the history or Black people in this country that went beyond slavery. Who were some of the heroes and she-roes and what did they do, and all the things they have been in? We thought that would be a source of inspiration that they could carry with them into the classroom.

The books still showed us—they had a few people in the books that were admirable, but no aspects of what other people were doing, all the inventions they had created and so on and so forth, or the heroism that they showed in defending this country in different wars. They were involved in all the wars, whether it was the Revolutionary War or the Civil War or whatever, but that story had never been told.

We said, well, if they won't tell them in the school, we'd tell them. It was new to us, too, but they need to know. We thought that while we were feeding their bodies and their minds and their spirit would know that they came from a place of dignity that was tampered with so people could make money and create capitalism on a grand scale, and because they had free labor for 250 years or whatever. That was going to make them rich no matter what.

I think part of it was that. Then, in setting up these health clinics, we also wanted people to have access, because at that time, the most prodigious health care facility was the King County Hospital, which is now Harborview and owned by the UW. But we said, "That's where people go to die, not to get well." People went there and you'd see people in these contraptions or whatever. You're laid out and bleeding to death or whatever. It was a terrible place to go. We knew people who said that if somebody in their family gets sick, they'd rather have them just die at home as opposed to being maligned or neglected at that hospital.

We wanted to figure out a way to create something that has some dignity with some resources that we could command, so we asked some people at the University of Washington if they would help us to begin to set up some clinics in spaces that we had available in different communities where people could come and get some basic first aid and some advice, whatever we could command.

They said, "Yes," so we were able to set up some clinics in different communities as part of our mission. That's what they were doing in Oakland, too. Our motivation came from this. It came from some of the comrades who went to a Black Student Union conference down in the Bay Area at San Francisco State.

That's where they met Bobby Seale, and they asked Bobby Seale, "Do you think we could set up a Panther Party in Seattle?" He flew up later and met with them a month later. He stayed here at Elmer Dixon's family

home, and he said, “Yes, we would like this to be a chapter.” It was first Oakland, and then LA, and we were the first Black Panther Party outside of California.

I think part of the issue for us was trying to figure out a way to expand the notion that it wasn’t just about being defiant against the police. Most of the coverage came from that, of battles with the police and shoot-outs and all that kind of stuff, the bravado part. But to me, at least the thing that I appreciated being in the Party for, was the part that dealt with our human needs, the part that dealt with everyday people, the part that was about people and didn’t have anything to do with guns. It had to do with the empty stomach, it had to do with having people have their bodies be dignified by having access to quality care, whether they had money or not. I thought that was really important.

The other part was actually about shaming some of the larger institutions into saying, “What are you doing? You know we don’t have all the resources. There are certain things we cannot do in these clinics because we don’t have the resources—we don’t have the human resources or the other resources that you need, the goods to make different things happen. That’s what you all should be doing.”

We found out along that pathway something very interesting. There was a bill passed after World War II—in between World War II, I think, and the Korean War—called the Hill-Burton [Act] . Hill-Burton said that hospitals could get some more resources if they took in people under the guise of what they called “uncompensated care.”

It was a national law that applied to hospitals. You could get more money to build a bigger hospital, but if poor people came to you and said, “I don’t have any money,” you had to deal with them. But here’s the way—I call it “trickeration.” The trickeration came out where poor people did what they were supposed to do initially, and you wouldn’t know if this was a Hill-Burton hospital, but they were required to put a plaque up to say “We don’t refuse admission to anybody.”

But they put a plaque where nobody could see it. It would be around the corner. Like if it was in this building, it would be in the alleyway or whatever, or the supply depot where people could see it, but you wouldn’t necessarily think, well, I can’t go there because I don’t have any money.

We did our best to try to call the hospitals out to say, “No, you have to do a better job. We know that you have the resources, and you’ve been able to expand through this bill. You’re making a lot of money and so you need to serve more people who don’t have money.”

We’re in the richest country in the world. It’s a contradiction that you can go to a place like Cuba or Nicaragua, where there is good healthcare is free, education is free.

“When the UN does their indices about who has the best healthcare, they always mention them, even though they don’t have as many resources as we have. And because of blockades, they can’t get better equipment. It’s like you’re dissing them because they’re Communist, but you’re also dissing them because of their population who, whether they’re Communist or not, deserve their human rights and their medical rights, by any means necessary.”

That was the idea. We wanted to make sure that in the community there was this understanding that we didn’t want them to think that the only people that defended the community, but we wanted to tell people that we weren’t afraid.

Of course, along the way, some of our comrades died. They were shot. It’s interesting for me, even though I was in the service and I had to carry a weapon, that’s the part about the party I didn’t believe in and engage myself

in as much as other people did. Maybe it's because I was a little bit older than them. My interest in being in the party was not necessarily carrying a gun.

[00:49:34] **KAREN:** Not the violence part.

[00:49:35] **GARRY:** Yeah, not the violence. My gun was my mind, my intellect and my heart, my compassion for people. That was my weapon. I would say that and people would disagree with me, saying, "No, that's not right." I'd say, "I've got a gun, but I'm not carrying it all the time. That's just not me."

They said, "Why?" I said, "I asked my dad, when he was growing up in Kansas City, did he carry a gun before he got into the service? He said, no. And I asked him 'Why? Was Kansas City not a dangerous place?' He said, 'Yeah, in some cases, it was. But my philosophy was the only reason you carry a gun is to use it. It's not an earring or a ring or something. It's something you use in your pocket and you're reaching for it and all that kind of stuff, so there's an intention about it. When you watch TV, there's hardly any TV shows where a gun is involved without people and not shooting. That's what it's for, whether it's cowboy shows or detective shows or whatever kind of show it is.'"

He just didn't believe in that philosophy, so I embrace that. I agree with him. He was afraid for me that I was in something that I could get killed. When me and my best friend joined, he came from a whole different class and background. His dad was affluent.

[00:51:16] **KAREN:** What was his name?

[00:51:21] **GARRY:** His name was James—Jim— [Brose and his dad was Rudy Brose?] , who was a local dentist. Did very well. When I met Jim, he was driving a Jaguar XKE. That was the car we'd fool around in and stuff. But he joined, too. We joined at the same time. He paid a price, though. I have to mention this as part of this interview.

Point #6 in the [Black Panther Party] Ten-Point Program says that all Black men should be exempt from military service. He'd already joined the Marine Reserve. Their headquarters was out in northeast Seattle at Sand Point.

We put our uniforms on, our berets and our black jackets, and we went there and asked to speak to the Commandant. We spoke to the Commandant and then he said, "What do you want?" Jim told his story and said, "I can't do this anymore. I am rejecting and refusing my commitment." He said, "According to this, you have two more years." He said, "I'm quitting right now," and he left.

We were staying in a house in the University District that we rented. He went to see his girlfriend, who lived on campus. The police came, the military police and the police, looking for him. He wasn't there so they left. I told Jim. Jim called his dad. His dad sent him to Canada that night, and then he went to the Balearic Islands, which are right off the coast of Spain, and stayed there for about a year and half. His name was on a list. He came back to Canada. They took his passport. He lost his citizenship, and then went into a down spiral from there.

I tried my best to stay engaged with him, but he'd lost everything and he couldn't do anything. They had him in this box. He ended up—if you've been to Vancouver, you know that right before you get into Vancouver, there's a long bridge that you go over that goes over the river. He jumped off of that bridge. That's the way he went.

It still is one of the saddest points in my life because he did what he thought was right, even though people said, "Jim had it made. All he had to do was stay in his lane and he'd be whatever." I said, "That's not where his

consciousness was. His consciousness was like mine, I guess. I wanted to help. I would even tell him, 'Man, you don't have to do this. I do, probably, but you don't.'"

I'll never forget it. He got mad at me and said, "I need this more than you do because I have privilege and I need to make sure that wherever I go in the next life, I can say I did something to help my people that was genuine and not fake."

I took that to heart. It still is a very disparaging thing for me to think somebody would be denied their ability to live, even to speak, just because they didn't want to be in the service anymore. And because he had a choice. He didn't necessarily have to join. He probably could have got a deferment when he was younger, but he didn't want to do that. That's why he joined.

After that, I made a commitment that I would always remember him, always remember our friendship and how much we loved each other and I appreciated his presence. I was actually part of his family and he was a part of mine. He was maybe one of the people to understand that class matters, but not in the way that we think of it, the traditional way.

He had a compassion that was really deep-seated and sincere. He just didn't want to be seen as the rich dentist's son that got everything. He got a new car, he got this and that. He said, "That's all material stuff. I understand that. My dad wants me to show our class accomplishments. That's the way we do it in our community."

But he also was proud of being—when I was in the Panthers, he never once told me I shouldn't be doing that, so I said, "That's cool. That's a good thing." My dad was just the opposite. My dad thought I'd be killed, so he really wasn't that enamored with me. But my grandmother was, so I took faith from her.

[00:57:07] **KAREN:** Kept her to your heart.

[00:57:09] **GARRY:** Yeah.

[00:57:11] **KAREN:** What are some of the lasting things that have happened since the Black Panthers? What's their contribution to Seattle?

[00:57:18] **GARRY:** I think the fact that we weren't afraid to resist. Resistance is a big word now. We had some compassion for the community. It wasn't just about us, it was really about them. The work to be done is still there; that we were here for just a quick minute, but the work is still to be done. There is a great value for all the community showing compassion for one another and not being so hyped up about what we don't have.

And this whole notion of we're not each other's enemies, so in general, white people and non-white people, or Black people, are not combatants. That's not the way it works. The issue for us always is the system. The system pits us against one another. The system makes a lot of money off of our labor, and we don't get as much as we should or could based on the way the system works.

We have other countries, like Scandinavian countries or other places or in Europe, where people have rights to certain kinds of things, like healthcare. I remember some years ago—maybe five years ago—when France decided to take away some of the obligations the Constitution had made to give the people healthcare in France, they shut down the frigging society. They shut down the country for months. [laughing] "This is something we use. You can't take it because it's really not yours, it's ours. It's our obligation. You need to pay for it. You need to oblige yourself to it, and we'll shut down society if you don't do it."

And they did! To me, at least, I think we have a system that needs to be like that. And there are barriers. In other words, they should just fight, but it's not enough. I understand now that what happens—and it blows me away

to say this, but it's true—I understand that Swedish Hospital that I happen to go to is the largest non-profit organization in the state—I think it's a non-profit—and I'm thinking, wait a minute, where we're sitting, there's this non-profit, but we don't have anything close to what they've got.

Yet and still, people make a lot of money off of being a non-profit. That, to me, is awful. To make money off of other people's misery, that is, to me, wrong, and I think we have a long way to go still. I think to have the Panther example to say, yeah, we need to have more consciousness about making sure that our system doesn't bankrupt itself so it can't take care of citizens.

It's supposedly the richest country in the world. If we are the richest country in the world, we need to spend the money on the people that need it the most and not be trying to charge them and jack them up, and be in bed with the people who say that everything depends on your deductible. Are you kidding me? If you've got no money, there is no deductible. The people that suffer the most are the people who can't play that game. It's an asset, but also, it denies them their human rights.

I think that's the lesson we've learned is that maybe we don't talk enough in our society about human rights. We talk a lot about the rights to be an American. It's all about waving the flag, and be all you can be, and all this other b.s., I call it, which defers us from doing the real questions about, if you want to claim to be the greatest country in the world, you've got to do the work. And you've got to use your resources to make sure that no one gets left behind. If you can't do that, stop saying that you're the greatest country.

You don't have to be the greatest country in the world, but now you're saying it and it's a lie. We might have the most guns. We might have the most money. We might have a lot of things, but there's a lot of things we don't have.

One of the things that I didn't tell you, and I'll just say it quickly. When I went to the World Racism Conference [World Conference Against Racism] in South Africa, I walked past this tent. It was a tent that had all this good information about water. I took it back to the hotel room.

My co-conspirator, I shared it with him, and he said, "Man, look at this." I said, "What is this?" He said, "It says here that 5,000 kids under the age of five die every day from drinking contaminated water." I said, "Nah, that can't be right." He said, "Yeah, that's true."

He started reading it to me, so I got really interested in water. I still am. That's my next iteration is to put myself in that mix if I can. But the notion somehow that water is being used as a commodity—I've been in Mexico several times. Mexico is one of the places that they send their water someplace else. And when they say about Mexico, "Don't drink the water," they're serious.

When I was there, they had the hose hooked up in a restaurant to their swimming pool. [laughing] The Mexicans even say, "Don't order anything that involves them putting their water in your drink." It has to be something that's bottled someplace else that has a cap on it. You'd be better off drinking a soft drink, even if it has a lot of sugar in it.

But I kept thinking, one of the things that has inspired me being in the Panthers, even just being in this organization, is to continue trying to figure out—I've tried to have a few start-ups, but I didn't know if I wanted to be a lone crusader or start a group or whatever. I don't know. I'm still trying to figure that out.

But I am really interested, so I gathered all this information, gathered all this stuff about water and what's going on in different places, and what the message needs to be. I think that will be my next real journey. That's what I made my commitment to. This year, and moving forward, I'm going to say what I said I was going to do. I've

been saying it now for a little while, but I haven't got enough of it done. I got enough information. Now, I need to start doing the work.

[01:04:58] **KAREN:** That leads into one of the questions I wanted to ask you about. What keeps you involved and active, particularly now, at this point in your life?

[01:05:08] **GARRY:** I think part of it is I just feel that we were all put here for a unique reason, a special reason. Sometimes we never find out or whatever. I have looked inside myself and I know what I do well and what I don't do well. I realize I don't feel bad that I don't get the accolades, and being out front like a lot of people who say, "You should be—"

No, I don't want that. That's not me. I think partly that is because of the way I was raised. The way I was raised is this. When my grandmother ran an apartment building—the apartment building is still there, or the space is still there but it's not an apartment building—off of 14th and Jackson on Main, actually, right down the street—when she came to our house or when she and her husband came to our house for Christmas or Thanksgiving, she always had to leave early.

I said, "Grandma, why do you have to leave?" She said, "Because I know of 10 or 15 tenants who, unless I go home and cook turkey for them—and I've already started it, and I have a big table in my apartment—they won't eat by themselves, or not eat at all."

This was on Christmas and New Year's that those people who were alone in her apartment building needed to know that somebody else cared, they cared about each other and all of that. That really struck me. I said, "Did they give you money?" She said, "No, they don't have any money. They can barely pay their rent. I'm paying for it because that's what I do. That makes me feel better when I'm gathering these people together."

That stuck with me that even though my grandmother didn't make a whole lot of money, didn't have a lot of education, but had a big heart, wanted to give. She doesn't ask for any reciprocity other than being nice to other people, maybe pay it forward or whatever you can. She didn't use those words. I'm using those words.

But that's my inspiration. If my grandmother could do it, I can do it. And it all came from here. [points to his heart] It didn't come from her credentials, or how much of this she had, or who she knew and all that. She knew who needed help. She knew that somebody who maybe only had $25 a week to pay for their rent might not be able to eat every day. She was aware of that, and she was aware that on a holiday, it gets manifested even more.

She said, "At the table, I ask people to talk about when they were kids, how they did those holiday events when they were kids." They would end up laughing, and lots of people would cry, but she wanted people to feel that same way in her apartment, that this was family. "You're not just a tenant. I care about you. And if you're going to be late on your rent and all that stuff, don't worry about it."

The real issue was that to be charitable, you don't have to ask permission. You either do it or you don't do it. That's the way I feel, so my notion about the water thing is people keep saying to me, "Why are you involving yourself in this and this and that?" I'm thinking, no, you're asking me to align myself with something that I don't have any passion for because all of a sudden, now my mission is their mission, but they've got a different mission.

They're sending out envelopes to people every week, like politicians. I get mad because the politicians—I won't say her name, but there's a politician who's famous now who sends me something every week to give her money. I mean, are you kidding me? Is that what this is all about? Is that politics, by sending you money every week, where you can be a permanent donor. You don't have to be a one-time donor.

That's bogus, to me, and I'm tired of that. I think that for me to use my time and energy for the time I've got left, and my resources, I want my legacy to say that Garry Owens maybe tried to help do something around the issue of access to clean water, whether if it's in this country or someplace else. Hopefully, I'll have a chance to do that real soon.

[01:10:02] **KAREN:** I hope so, too. I have a bunch of other questions, if that's okay.

[01:10:07] **GARRY:** Oh, go ahead.

[01:10:12] **KAREN:** How did you get involved with PSARA?

[01:10:16] **GARRY:** It's an easy answer. I went to school with Robby Stern. He was at the university when I was there and he was out there, he was pushing it. He was in the Students for a Democratic Society. He was in that process and all that, so we had an alignment with them in the Black Panther Party and the Black Student Union, so I had known him for a long time.

He had been asking me for four years—actually from when he got started—and I couldn't commit then. But he was persistent, so he finally caught me at a time when I was going to a friend's funeral. He caught me and he asked me if I would be willing to come on the Board, and finally, I said, yes, I will.

[01:11:07] **KAREN:** Persistence pays off.

[01:11:08] **GARRY:** I said to him, "Man, you're like a bulldog on my pants." [laughing]

[01:11:15] **KAREN:** We're delighted that you joined us.

[01:11:18] **GARRY:** It's a very interesting group. It reminded me of some of the groups that I've been in in the past where there's a lot of passion and a lot of flow and good energy, so it makes me feel when I go because I realize that age doesn't matter. It's not about how old we are, it's that we still care about ourselves, and that we don't want to be dissed just because we are older. But if you don't say anything, people put you in that category that you're obsolete. You don't matter because you're not in the flow. Your flow has passed, and now you're just hanging on.

I don't agree with that. I think that that's ageist. I don't agree with that ageism philosophy. All the conversation in this society is about young people. We talk all about the millennials, which is fine to talk about them, but they're not the only ones here. [laughing]

We know that in some cases, it's our grandparents or great-grandparents or parents who built this society, not the millennials. They haven't built anything yet. They just have a job, and that's different. Building something and having a job is different.

People sometimes say, "You sound like you're hostile." I say, "No, I'm just telling the truth. I've studied. I'm not a would-be scholar. I know what I'm talking about. I can document." I said, "Back in my day or my parents' days, they would send people who were young to war to die, and sometimes come back and not get a job till they passed the G.I. Bill."

They go, "What? I'm going to die for my country, but I'm not dead. I come back and I can't get a job?" "Oh, you don't have any experience." "I've had a lot of experience getting shot at. What does that count for?"

I think part of it is that I think we need to rearrange our priorities and make sure that if we really believe that age doesn't matter, and then if we have to whoop and holler and do whatever we have to do go get people's

attention, they just don't think much of itinerant old people who are mad. But I'll take that, too, as long as you don't take away the mad. If we have to be mad to make our case, I'll take that, but we can say it in a civil way.

But you can't blow us off like it doesn't matter. That makes people's blood pressure go up and that's not right. You have to take us serious. We're still here. If we weren't here, that would be a different story, but we are here, and we know our contribution to the society and what our parents did.

In most cases, the people I talk to, when they tell me their story about how they grew up and how much reverence they had for how hard their parents worked, or their grandparents or whatever, that was an inspiration to them to know that I have to work as hard. Maybe I don't have to, but that's my inspiration.

My dad's favorite expression is, "If we don't work, we don't eat." I said, "Where did that come from?" He told me a story. I had three siblings. I was the oldest. We were growing up in the Depression in Kansas City, Missouri. We came home one day from school and my parents had left a note that said, "We can't do it anymore." Basically, the parents abandoned them, the kids.

The kids were 12, 10, eight and six. Two boys and two girls. They had to be on the streets of Kansas City for two years, scuffling. How did they do it? He said, "I had a model. We said this every day we were together. 'If we don't work, we don't eat.'" That's the way they stayed together.

But the worker was inside of him. He knew he had to work, so when I was growing up, my dad had two or three jobs. All the time. That was just what he grew up with. Even though he ended up having the longest-term job he had with the post office, and he made a good salary, he still felt, even when he wasn't working, that he needed to be working, so he had a job over here and a job over there.

People said, "Sylvester, you make good money at the post office. You don't need to have that job." "That's just the way I grew up. I don't golf, I'm not a bowler. I play cards and stuff, and I drink a little Scotch at home, and read the newspaper and watch TV and mind my own business."

I think part of it, for me, was to say that he grew up in a society in which anything could happen. My dad was a person who believed in doing whatever you needed to do to take care of his family, but also making sure that you didn't put yourself in a position where you had to make excuses that you didn't need to make.

The idea was "I'm willing to work, whatever that means, if I have to have two jobs to take care of my family so we don't have to have that same situation I grew up in." I asked him if he was bitter. He said, "No. I think my parents probably grieved for the rest of their lives that they had to leave their children behind, but they couldn't take care of them."

I said, "Was it their ego?" He said, "No, it was their broken heart to know that everything that you do, they're in school or whatever, and there's nothing to eat—nothing—that drove them nuts, so they had to go." I said, "Okay." I used to say, "Dad, I hope you don't leave us." He said, "No, no."

But part of it for me was that that's the way I thought about my own destiny. I think of people on a wider scope of who my family is, so I am really generous. People think I'm stupid. I just read people. Sometimes I give people money and they don't even ask me. I just say, "I want you to have this because I just do." Some people want to say, "I'll pay you back." I say, "No, I got it. I'm giving it to you. It's not much. I just want you to know that somebody cares about you. I don't have to know anything about you. Even if you misuse the money, which you could, I still want you to know this is a gift from me. No strings attached. I'm not selling you nothing. I'm giving you something."

I did buy a woman the other day a bag of groceries—a young Black woman—and I said, "What can I get you?" "Could you get me a sandwich and some water to drink?" I said, "Yeah," and so I gave her $10, too.

I used to tell my friends that and they'd say, "Man, people are playing you. You shouldn't do that." I said, "Whatever. She might be on a whole bunch of stuff, but at that time, it wasn't about her. It was about me. It was about me sharing what I had that made me feel good. That's all that mattered at that particular time."

Yeah, some people will petition, and I can see they don't really need my help. I did it when I was working. I worked for the City of Seattle for 25 years in the Department of Neighborhoods. I used to see people sitting down on Third Avenue.

One guy asked me, "Can you give me some money for some cigarettes?" I said, "No, I don't smoke, and you shouldn't be smoking either." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "You shouldn't be smoking." And he did like this. [He runs his hand up and down his arm] The guy had on a Longines watch, and I'm thinking, what?

He said, "What's the problem?" I said, "Man, you know what? I should knock you upside the head and take your watch straight to the pawn shop and spread whatever I get to all the people down here." What he said was that it was just an experiment. He was well-to-do. It was just a game for him. He wanted to come down and feign poverty so he could know what it felt like.

I said, "You're never going to feel right because if you wear a Longines watch, you could solve a lot more poverty than I could." And I kept thinking, it doesn't make any sense. But it made me understand this. If we don't put ourselves in a situation to care more about each other, we're doomed.

The notion of where that caring came from, it has to come from your heart and your head, and your hands, and some intellect, and some compassion. A lot of those things you can't buy. It don't mean necessarily that you went to college or that you're crazier than a junebug, you can still do something.

I think that's where it is for me in PSARA. I see them as a really diverse group of people who are interested in a lot of different things, and they have the energy and the resolve to want to be involved. They might have a little more passion than I do for the electoral system. I don't have as much passion about it as they do, but I respect it. I respect it.

[01:22:07] **KAREN:** We're really glad you're involved with us, and we're really glad that we're involved with so many things that you've done throughout your life, which is very compassionate and caring.

[01:22:16] **GERRY:** For me, I think this is a good place to be because to be in one of these houses of labor like this, where it's everything is around and stuff, like the mural and all the things that are here, what this organization stands for is very, very inspirational for me to come here.

Partly, it's because this was my mentor's union shop place. I think it's Local 46. Since he was an electrician, this is where he used to do his battles, right here in this building, so this building has a lot of sentimental notions for me, thinking about Tyree. Every time I come in here, I keep thinking he's here. He would want me to be doing this work.

When he asked me to come on the Board, at the time, Cindy was on the Board, and I was just bringing her to the meetings, but he wanted me to sit in on the meetings, even though I wasn't a member. Finally, he asked me, after about three or four years, whether I would be a member, and I said, "Yes."

I've been on the Board for 26 years now. It's hard because our organization has gone through what all organizations have been through. Sometimes you don't feel very relevant. But we've got serious history that we

have to abide by because the things that we were struggling for still need warriors on the front line to do the work.

So, we're trying to figure out how inspire some younger people and some other people to do it, not our way but their way, whatever it is, as long as it's genuine and it has some credibility to it, and that involves people in a way that the work is accessible to them, as opposed to asking the people to do something that they can't do or don't do or don't want to do.

[01:24:16] **KAREN:** This is one of the final questions I wanted to ask. What advice can you give to those generations of political activists that want to follow in your footsteps?

[01:24:26] **GARRY:** I would say that the main thing is to harness your passion in a way that has some deliverables that really mean something to somebody else, not just you. Don't just be satisfied about what you're doing. Try to figure out if what you're doing has some positive outcomes, at least going in that direction, even if you never see it. The ideas that people's consciousness, that people's awareness that they way that people accept defeat as a lesson, because you've got to go back and put it back together and say, well, if we made mistakes, what were they? We're not perfect. We either did too much over here or not enough over here. We knew we gave John or Susie the wrong job, a job that they didn't want in the first place. We forced them to do it so they didn't do a good job.

You have to use people's assets that they bring to the table. It's not unkind to ask people to grow and do something else, but you've got to say that when you do that, you're taking a risk. Some people's compassion is wound around what they really think that they do well.

Some people are more honest about taking risks, or their work ethic is about taking risks. Some people are not. Their comfort zone is this, not this. [holds his hands together closely, then far apart] So, if you give them this and they only bring back this, it's probably your fault more than their fault because you're asking them to do something they don't want to really do, and they don't have the tools to do it. "I thought you were gonna do this or do that." You sent some people out to go canvass to get money for things and all that.

I went to a fundraising program for two years at the UW to learn how to be a fundraiser and all that. One of the main things they talked about is that one of the main fears people have is asking people for money, even in [unintelligible] like this. Why? Because they don't want to hear a "No." One of our instructors gave us a list of 10 reasons why people would say "no," and none of them had to do with they didn't like the organization. It wasn't the right time. They had other things on their agenda right then. Whatever. They were all legitimate. It was just today, no, I can't give you $100, but next month, or two weeks from now, whenever, ask me again, and as long as we stay in touch, and I still feel compassion about the work that you're trying to do.

But some people would personalize it and say, "If you don't give me the $100, that's a rejection of me." You've got to tell yourself it ain't about you. You're just asking, and you have to be aware of the impact it could or should have on you. It's not personal, because you're not asking for money for yourself, you're asking for the cause.

If you think you have people that can go door to door to ask good people, and they have a list—we had a list of high rollers and stuff in some cases. When I was on the board of ATR—A Territory Resource—that changed into Social Justice Fund [Northwest] —I was on the Board for seven years. High rollers would tell the same story at the meetings. "Oh, yeah, we could give you $10,000 today, but we're not, and this is why. But two weeks from now, or next month, come back and ask again."

[01:28:18] **KAREN:** Be persistent.

[01:28:19] **GARRY:** Yeah, and we were. "You said come back, and we're back." And they were fine with that.

I'll end by saying that I think that in a society that is somehow caught up with the economics of everything, sometimes that ends up taking over other elements that we should take into consideration about how we survive and how we move forward, and how we claim victory, in some cases.

Sometimes it's not about the money. It's about, how do we manifest our care for each other, and for the community, and for the society in general in a way that they get it? Sometimes it's through events and sometimes it's through other means.

This is what Tyree Scott used to say. He said, "I didn't get my inspiration from going to college." We called him a worker intellectual. He was the smartest guy I ever met. He read books that—I said, "You reading these kinds of books?" He said, "Yeah." That's one of the things we had [in common] . We liked to read.

But his notion was, he said, "My class history did not close down my mind. After I knew I could read, and after I was in the service, I realized that my reading ability went way up. I could read whatever I wanted. And I lived in a society that had the greatest capacity in the world for knowledge, in the sense that we had free public libraries."

He said, "When I was in the Third World, no such thing. Even in other progressive societies, like India, you have to have money to really go to a place to get a book. And it's not that you're buying the book. It's just to use the book, you've got to pay for it."

He said, "So, the concept of having a society where you can have free information, and all you have to have is a little plastic card and you can keep it for two weeks, and you can renew it two or three times, that's the greatest asset in the world. But people have to use it. And they can't say, 'We don't know.' That's a weak excuse. We could know and we should know, as workers and as people. We need to have the information, and that's going to be our greatest asset. It ain't how smart we are. It's having the information that we can document. You don't have to agree with me. Agree with what the scholars say. You can have this information and talk to 1,000 people and all that, that's the information. Not me. You don't have to believe anything I say, but I got proof."

That's why he lives within my mind and my heart, as well as all the other people I mentioned in my family, and you, and all the people that, to me, are serious about what they do. I think that's what inspires me and I'll do it until my last breath comes.

I really appreciate this opportunity and I appreciate this process that you're going through, of talking to the members in our organization and in the community. I think that this is an important way to make sure that our stories are not neglected, or are only important because of who we are or who we are not.

I think sometimes we get into—this is the last thing I'll say—what I've seen, even when we had the Panther event, you could see that even in the Panther event, there was some egos, and other stuff going on, and people had this whatever and all this kind of stuff. Okay, whatever. I'm not doing that.

I know what I did and how I did it. I knew who I was close to and we were fine with that. Those of us who didn't get as much recognition as maybe we deserved, that's just the way it went. It's fine with me.

I think a big part of it is as long as it doesn't diminish the capacity to keep doing the work, that's what I try to tell people. Don't let somebody turn you off. If you want to turn off, turn off, but don't say it's because of

So-and-So, Susie or Bill. To me, that's weak. If you're tired and you don't want to do anything, or you want to go in a different direction or whatever, then just do it. But don't use somebody else as an excuse.

People say, "What do you mean by that?" I say, "I had to work in a lot of different situations. I worked for the city for 25 years. I met a lot of people. No, I wouldn't go to dinner with them—maybe if it was just me and them—but I had to work with them. I had to respect them as my workmates, and I had to respect their opinion, even though I didn't agree."

They said, "What do you mean by that?" I said, "If I didn't agree, it doesn't mean I'm not coming to work tomorrow. Or, 'I'm not coming to work, boss, because I didn't agree with Karen.'" [laughing]

It doesn't work like that. You don't get to choose unless you're the boss. You don't get to choose your coworkers. You don't get to choose their perspective about a lot of different things. You don't have to accept it, necessarily, but that's the ambience you have to work around, and you have to figure those people who are hanging in the best are the ones who figure it out, and know, like they say in poker, know when to hold 'em and know when to fold 'em.

That's the way I'll end it.

[01:34:39] **KAREN:** Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.